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Navy Chaplains: Partners in Care to Help Build Spiritual Resilience

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Editor's Note: Blog was originally posted on NavyNavStress. It was contributed by Navy and Marine Corps Public Health Center Health Promotion and Wellness Department, and the Navy Chief of Chaplains Office

One conversation can save a life. As part of Navy's effort to encourage Sailors and Marines to access psychological health and emotional well-being resources, the [Navy and Marine Corps Public Health Center](#) recently met with the [Navy Chief of Chaplains' Office](#) to discuss the role of chaplains in providing support to Sailors, Marines, and their family members in difficult times.

Sailors, Marines, and their family members must be “resilient,” and chaplains can help build spiritual resilience and reinforce a sense of connectedness and hope. “Resilient people are connected people,” said Navy chaplain Capt. David Bynum. Spiritual resilience recognizes that life has fundamental meaning and value based on a belief in the transcendent, of something greater than oneself. Chaplains understand this may have a different meaning for people depending on the individual’s faith background so chaplains help people wherever they are in their spiritual journey to contextualize their lives and reframe their struggles so they can move forward. Their aim is to help people regain a sense of hope and meaning in life.

Within the [Navy Chaplain Corps](#), 81 chaplains and 41 Religious Program Specialists currently serve as suicide prevention coordinators. Over the past year, one of the key initiatives for the Chaplain Corps has been to enhance skills in suicide prevention, intervention and postvention. The Chaplain Corps’ FY15 Professional Development Training Course trained chaplains and RPs in the use of evidence-based tools, such as the Veterans Affairs (VA) Safety Plan and the Columbia Suicide Severity Rating Scale (C-SSRS), to conduct risk assessments. As partners in care, this training ensures that chaplains have the tools to provide the best pastoral care possible to Sailors, Marines and families. This includes knowing when to refer them to psychological health professionals for additional help.

Talking about psychological and emotional health can be difficult and at times overwhelming. Navy chaplains can be a great resource for Sailors, Marines, and their family members struggling with these conversations, which often involve underlying spiritual issues. Chaplains are embedded in commands and serve alongside Sailors and Marines at sea, ashore, in training commands, and in medical centers and hospitals. This close connection and shared identity help build trust with Sailors and Marines and make chaplains a unique resource. They are, in fact, the only ones in the command who offer 100% confidentiality to their people, regardless of the individual’s religious beliefs.

Chaplains cannot be compelled by the command, medical professionals, or others when it comes to disclosing what a service member or family member shares in confidence. The confidential relationship also extends to oral, written and electronic communication (e.g. letters, emails, and text messages). That being said, the chaplain will not leave an individual alone if the individual or others are at risk. The chaplain is committed to the ultimate goal of the commander and all partners in care: To get the individual the support he/she needs.

This also includes family members.

Family members are often the ones attuned to changes in their loved one but may fear repercussion on their family member’s career if they speak up. It’s important to note that chaplains can serve as advocates in the command to get you or your loved one the help needed before a crisis occurs. This one small act can make the difference.

Chaplains can also provide family members and service members with guidance and support in how to approach one another during relationship challenges. “Both family members and service members play a key role in creating resilience, and it’s important that they both consider their counterparts’ point of view, especially when the service member is deployed,” said Bynum.

Looking for a safe place to talk about life’s everyday stressors? Are you concerned about your loved one?

Call Navy 311 to request chaplain support in your area: 1-855-NAVY-311 or text to: Navy311@navy.mil.

To find out more information about the Navy Chaplain Corps and 100% confidentiality, visit <http://www.navy.mil/local/crb/>.

For additional resources on psychological health well-being, please visit the Navy and Marine Corps Public Health Center, Health Promotion and Wellness Department website at <http://www.med.navy.mil/sites/nmcphc/health-promotion/psychological-emotional-wellbeing/Pages/psychological-emotional-wellbeing.aspx>.

If you or someone you know is in immediate danger, call 911. If you or someone you know is contemplating suicide, seek assistance immediately by contacting the Military Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255, or the Marine DSTRESS Line at 1-877-476-7734.

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